

## Message Text

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44

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 AID-05 OMB-01 SY-05

SR-02 ORM-01 /063 W

----- 117701

P R 221050Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3448

INFO DIA WASHDC

USIA WASHDC

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 2722

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, MOPS, PINS, LA

SUBJECT: MILITARY ACTIVITY IN LAOS

REF: A) STATE 090601 (NOTAL)

B) STATE 091203 (NOTAL)

1. MILITARY ACTION IN LAOS IN RECENT WEEKS--WHILE IN SOME RESPECTS MORE NOTEWORTHY THAN HAD BEEN SEEN IN 1974--HAS BEEN LIMITED AND LOCALIZED.

2. THERE HAVE BEEN FOUR PRINCIPAL AREAS IN WHICH MILITARY ACTIVITY HAS OCCURRED IN LAST FEW WEEKS:

A) WHILE THERE HAS BEEN NO FIGHTING AT BAN HOUEI SAI SINCE DECEMBER, THE PL HAVE BEEN REINFORCING THEIR FORCES ALL AROUND THE TOWN TO THE POINT THAT VIENTIANE SIDE HAS NOW VIRTUALLY CONCLUDED AREA CAN NO LONGER BE RESTORED TO ITS CONTROL. (THIS OF COURSE BEGS THE QUESTION, SINCE

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VIENTIANE SIDE HAS NEVER MADE ANY REAL ATTEMPT TO

REASSERT ITS CONTROL.)

B) DAN SUONG/NAN YANG AREA APPROXIMATELY 20 KILOMETERS NNW OF VIENTIANE AND WEST OF ROUTE 13. ACTIVITY IN THIS AREA WAS KICKED OFF BY FAR ON MARCH 27 AND, AFTER INITIAL FLURRY, HAS DECLINED TO LEVEL OF SPORADIC CONTACTS. NO MORE THAN EQUIVALENT OF ONE OR TWO COMPANIES ARE KNOWN TO BE INVOLVED ON EITHER SIDE. FAR OF COURSE WAS REACTING (AND IN OUR VIEW ENTIRELY JUSTIFIABLY IF NOT PRUDENTLY) TO SLOW, STEADY BUILD-UP OF PATHET LAO STRENGTH IN THIS LOCALITY WHICH WAS TRADITIONALLY UNDER CONTROL OF VIENTIANE SIDE AND WHICH LIES JUST OUTSIDE VIENTIANE NEUTRALIZED ZONE. PL ACTIVITY HAD CULMINATED IN ACTS OF HARASSMENT AGAINST VILLAGERS ON GROUND AND RLAF HELICOPTERS IN THE AIR, WHICH RLGAFF FINALLY FOUND INTOLERABLE. (FOR BACKGROUND, SEE VIENTIANE 2236 AND DAO VIENTIANE IR6-856-0078 75.)

C) REPORT OF INCIDENT ON APRIL 10 IN WHICH KHMER COMMUNIST FORCES MORTARED A FAR POSITION ON KHONG ISLAND IN SOUTHERNMOST LAOS; THERE WERE APPARENTLY NO CASUALTIES IN THIS INCIDENT, WHICH IN ITSELF WE CONSIDER ISOLATED AND OF LIMITED SIGNIFICANCE ALTHOUGH ILLUSTRATIVE OF REPORTED FAR-KC TENSIONS IN THE AREA.

D) MOST RECENTLY, THE ACTIVITY AROUND SALA PHOU KHOUN, WHERE PATHET LAO HAVE SINCE APRIL 14 CAPTURED AT LEAST THREE AND POSSIBLY AS MANY AS SEVEN LIGHTLY DEFENDED FAR OUTPOSTS ALONG ROUTE 7. BEFORE RECENT ACTIONS, FAR HOLDINGS EXTENDED AS FAR AS U TO 8 KILOMETERS EAST OF THE JUNCTION. AS POINTED OUT IN VIENTIANE 2649, THIS EPISODE FOLLOWS PATTERN OF PREVIOUS PL ACTIVITY IN THE SAME AREA. THERE ARE REPORTS, WHICH WE STRESS ARE STILL UNCONFIRMED, THAT AN "NVA BATTALION" HAS SUPPORTED THE ESTIMATED TWO PL BATTALIONS INVOLVED IN THIS ACTIVITY AND THAT TWO PT-76 TANKS HAVE BEEN EMPLOYED. MR-II COMMANDER GENERAL VANG PAO, WHOSE CAPABILITIES FOR

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RESPONSE ARE LIMITED, HAS USED T-28 STRIKES AGAINST THE PL ATTACKERS AS HE DID IN FEBRUARY AND HAS SENT LIMITED REINFORCEMENTS INTO THE AREA, BRINGING TOTAL OF FAR DEFENDERS IN SALA PHOU KHOUN AREA TO AN ESTIMATED TOTAL OF 300 TO 350. FAR GENERAL STAFF AND MINDEF SISOUK REMAIN DETERMINED TO RETAKE LOST FAR POSITIONS AND CORRECTLY REGARD THIS PL ACTIVITY AS A BLATANT VIOLATION

OF THE CEASE-FIRE. IN HIS APRIL 21 PRESS  
CONFERENCE (VIENTIANE 2690), SISOUK ALSO ANNOUNCED  
THAT PRIME MINISTER HAD SENT TELEGRAM THAT MORNING  
TO PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG IN SAM NEUA, ASKING HIM  
TO ORDER PL TO WITHDRAW TO THEIR ORIGINAL POSITIONS.

3. MOTIVATION OF PL ACTION IN SALA PHOU KHOUN AREA REMAINS  
UNCERTAIN, AND TIMING OF ACTION--TO COINCIDE WITH LAO NEW  
YEAR AND PASSAGE OF DIPLOMATIC CONVOY TO AND FROM LUANG  
PRABANG ON APRIL 15 AND 17--REMAINS PUZZLING. ONE THEORY  
IS THAT PL ACTION IS SIMPLY RETALIATION FOR THE ACTION IN  
DAN SUONG AREA (PARA 2/B ABOVE). OTHER PRINCIPAL THEORY,  
SET FORTH BY MINDEF SISOUK AT HIS APRIL 21 PRESS CONFERENCE,  
IS THAT PL ARE SEEKING TO FULFILL LONG-TIME OBJECTIVE OF  
CONTROLLING THE JUNCTION AND/OR CREATING DIVERSION FOR  
POSSIBLE RPT POSSIBLE ATTACK ON MR-II HEADQUARTERS AT LONG  
TIENG AND/OR MUONG CHA (UF 0091).

4. LOOKING AT OVER-ALL PL MILITARY ACTIVITIES OF PAST WEEKS, IT  
DOES APPEAR THAT PL HAVE BEEN CAREFULLY AND GRADUALLY  
TESTING AREAS OF WEAKNESS IN VIENTIANE SIDE ZONE AND  
USING MILITARY MEANS WHERE NECESSARY. WHILE THERE IS  
AS YET NO CLEAR EVIDENCE THAT PL HAVE DECIDED TO EXERT  
GREATER MILITARRESSURES IN LIGHT OF COMMUNIST SUCCESSES  
IN CAMBODIA AND VIET-NAM, SPECULATION AMONG DIPLOMATIC  
CORPS AND FAR IS GROWING THAT PL MAY INDEED NOW CHOSE  
THE MILITARY OPTION.

5. IN LIGHT OF ALL THE PRESENT UNCERTAINTIES HERE, WE  
WOULD RECOMMEND THAT DEPARTMENT, IN INTERPRETING THESE  
DEVELOPMENTS TO PRESS, TAKE FULLY INTO ACCOUNT THEIR SO  
FAR LIMITED AND ISOLATED NATURE, AND IN PARTICULAR AVOID  
ANY LINKING OF MILITARY ACTIVITIES IN LAOS TO SITUATION  
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IN CAMBODIA AND VIET-NAM. WE SHOULD DO NOTHING TO ADD  
TO GROWING ANXIETIES OF VIENTIANE SIDE.

6. IN A SEPARATE MESSAGE WE WILL COMMENT ON PROBLEM OF  
PRESS COVERAGE OF MILITARY ACTION HERE.  
CHAPMAN

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NNN



## Message Attributes

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**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** COMBAT OPERATIONS, COMBAT ZONES, MILITARY PLANS  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 22 APR 1975  
**Decaption Date:** 01 JAN 1960  
**Decaption Note:**  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** GolinoFR  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
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**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
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**Original Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
**Original Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Page Count:** 3  
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Previous Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** n/a  
**Reference:** 75 STATE 090601  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** GolinoFR  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 18 JUL 2003  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <18 JUL 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <22 JUL 2003 by GolinoFR>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
05 JUL 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** MILITARY ACTIVITY IN LAOS  
**TAGS:** MILI, MOPS, PINS, LA  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006